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Kluger, N.

2020-07

Kluger , N 2020 , ' Pitfalls of possible reporting of same patients with COVID-19 in dermatology journals ' , Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology , vol. 34 , no. 7 , pp. E309-E310 . <https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.16690>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/332688>

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.16690>

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Article type : Letter to Editor

Journal: Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology

Article type: Letter to Editor

Pitfalls of possible reporting of same patients with COVID-19 in dermatology journals

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Word count: 424

Reference: 11

This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the [Version of Record](#). Please cite this article as [doi: 10.1111/JDV.16690](#)

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COI – None

Funding – None

Dear Editor,

The Editor in chief and Deputy Editors of the *JAMA* recently shared their concern regarding possible reporting of patients in more than one manuscript, while this has not been clearly indicated in the submission [1]. Although the unprecedented context of the COVID-19 outbreak justifies efforts for rapid dissemination of knowledge, such practice may be responsible for inaccurate interpretation and overestimation of published data [1]. Similar concern applies to dermatology. In Spain, the national COVID Piel study have reported 372 patients with skin manifestations related with COVID-19, including 71 patients with pseudo-chilblains, from April 3rd to April 16th [2]. One of the co-authors published in the meantime a series of 132 patients with chilblains from March 5th to April 15th [3]. The question of a possible overlap of cases is open to discussion. A French group published on one hand a retrospective nationwide study of 277 patients with skin lesions related with COVID-19 from March 18th to April 9th [4], and on the other hand 14 patients from a retrospective nationwide study from March 18th to April 6th 2020 [5]. They also published a letter about the analysis of 285 cases submitted on a WhatsApp® group from March 14th till April 10th 2020 [6]. None of the articles mentions the others. Corresponding authors acknowledged that most of the cases reported in [5] have been also included in [4]. The French Society of Dermatology has just finished collecting cases of patients with acral lesions for the COVIDSKIN study (inclusion from March 30th to May 4th), but the study is still on going for other lesions [7]. It will be important to know whether dermatologists that took part in the previous studies [4-6] have also included the same patients in the forthcoming study. The same question apply to French colleagues who have already published or will publish case report/cases

series on their own. We found also manuscripts mentioning multiple reports of the same patient. In Italy, among a series of 22 patients with COVID 19-related varicella-like lesions [8], an eight year-old-girl has been also published independently [9], but the authors mentioned the previous series [8] in the article [9]. Some cases need also better clarification. Joob & Wiwanitkit submitted on the same day two seemingly looking-like case reports in two different journals [10,11]. However, the corresponding author kindly confirmed that both cases were different patients. With the very high number of publications on COVID-19, authors need to remain transparent for the reader about multiple reports of same patients to avoid misinterpretation of the data [1].

Disclaimer: The present letter relies only on accepted online pre-proofs before they are published in their final form

Acknowledgement: The author wishes to thank Pr Martine Bagot and Pr Jean-David Bouaziz (Paris), Dr Beuy Joob (Bangkok), and Pr Angelo Marzano (Milan) for kindly answering to the author's enquiries and for their transparency. At the time of submission of this manuscript, one corresponding author had not yet replied. The author is indebted with Pr Mahtab Samimi (Tours) for useful comments regarding the manuscript.

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